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Expansion of Democracy

From monarchy and conquest to democratic rule, self-determination, and peaceful coexistence, democracy has played an essential role in shaping the history of civilization. When democracy was first introduced in ancient Greece, there were far more enslaved people than citizens, making it difficult for anybody to take part. Democracy then mostly disappeared until it reappeared in the late 18th century as “representative democracy” (Capozzi). Since then, it has been widely accepted that human history in the contemporary age is moving toward greater democracy. Today, democracy is a cornerstone in American life. Not only does democracy promote American principles like religious freedom and labor rights, but it also helps to create a safer, more stable, and more wealthy global environment in which the United States may pursue its national interests (Capozzi). Democracy in America is the foundation that leads to capitalism, freedom, and individual growth. It is the foundation that every other country should build around to achieve the highest economic and social prosperity levels. Given examples like modern-day socialism in Vietnam or communism in China, to what extent are American-style democracy and capitalism a ticket to prosperity for nations fighting authoritarian rule?

While in the United States in 1831 studying prisons, Alexis de Tocqueville, a French sociologist and political theorist came back to France with an enormous amount of information on American society, which he compiled into his book, “Democracy in America,” a comprehensive examination of American society and politics. Two hundred years later, Tocqueville’s book is still a valuable tool for describing the United States to others and describing the United States to Americans. Equality was Tocqueville’s cherished political and social ideal, and he argued that the United States was the most advanced example of equality in

action. He appreciated the individuality of the American people; he was wary of the dangers of an atomized and ironically uniform society, where “every citizen, being absorbed to all the others, gets lost in the mass” (Tocqueville).

Deborah Schildkraut, an American political scientist at Tufts University, said, “at a minimum American identity consists of two sets of norms. One involves an evolving set of beliefs that anyone can follow. These beliefs harken back to Thomas Jefferson and the ideals outlined in the Declaration of Independence. ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.’ The other set of norms depends on attributes such as one’s race and religion” (Schildkraut). Tocqueville backs Schildkraut when he says, “I must say that I have often seen Americans make great and real sacrifices to the public welfare, and I have noticed a hundred instances in which they hardly ever failed to lend faithful support to one another” (Tocqueville). American identity is the patriotism that every American feels because every American can flourish from the free set of values that guide the nation. Opponents argue that individualism fosters a lack of care for society’s poorest members, resulting in increased economic disparity (*The rise of authoritarian capitalism in the twenty-first century*). Individualism, however, promotes personal success and independence, as well as the ability to determine one’s destiny.

As we see it now, the United States was not a society built on equality in 1831. The Indians were treated as though they were an alien race that needed to be exterminated. Slave owners saw their slaves as their property. Women were denied the right to vote and were subject to the authority of their husbands under the law. “A woman loses her freedom permanently in the shackles of marriage in America,” remarked Tocqueville (Tocqueville). Only free white adult

men were considered equal in Tocqueville's America. Only this group was entitled to full citizenship privileges. Tocqueville's fascination with the United States was piqued by even this small degree of equality, which rendered the country drastically different from the rest of the globe. American democracy now is more inclusive than it has ever been. It wasn't until the 19th Amendment in 1920 that women were granted the right to vote in all 50 states. The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was the first time that African-Americans in the South realized their right to vote under the Fifteenth Amendment. When Presidents were able to send young men and women under the age of twenty-one to fight and die throughout the world, they could do so even if those same young people could not vote in most elections prior to the 1970s. Therefore, American democracy is considerably better than it was 50, 100, or 200 years ago in almost every way possible. In many basic respects, democracy has triumphed in the twentieth century (Allison) as Americans have combated Nazism, totalitarianism, and communism, to name a few. American-style democracy seems stronger and more vibrant than ever at the turn of the century (Allison).

Today a worldwide pandemic ravages the world with disregard for democratic processes. Democracy is now in critical danger around the world, and it affects every person. Democracy worldwide cannot be overrun; freedom and prosperity will be limited (Allison). In 2020, the number of nations heading toward authoritarianism outweighed those moving toward democracy (Banerjee). As a result of the pandemic, a five-year downtrend has been maintained, which has been unprecedented since the 1970s (Banerjee). A growing number of democratically elected administrations are resorting to authoritarian tactics, even in established democracies (Banerjee). In some of the world's most powerful countries, the backsliding has been particularly alarming (Brazil, India).

More democracy and freedom create a vicious loop of enhanced security, stronger economic development, and long-term relationships that benefit the United States (Capozzi). The foundations of international stability are laid by governments that are transparent, efficient, and democratic (Capozzi). It is imperative that America's official investments in fostering democracy and governance overseas be maintained. International democracy and governance projects have always had bipartisan support because of their advantages and strong representation of American principles dating back to the founding fathers (Norman). However, as a result of the Iraq War, this support has been weakened during the previous decade (Norman). People, rather than government, driven initiatives to support civil society and responsible government are highlighted by the recent democratic openings in the Middle East, Africa, and Southeast Asia (Banerjee).

The Eurasia Group Foundation has completed research on foreign public perceptions of the United States and its political system. Emerging market democracies have a negative view of the United States, but they believe that United States democracy protects the rule of law better than their own (Gel'man). While most people in authoritarian countries dislike U.S. foreign policy, the vast majority of them want more political freedom in their own nations (Gel'man). According to the results from these nations, "attraction" rather than "promotion" is the best strategy for promoting democracy throughout the globe (Gel'man). Politicians in the United States have been preoccupied with other nations' laws and structures, but not their political cultures. Voters would sacrifice short-term security and stability for the opportunity to exercise their democratic rights (Gel'man). The United States utilized military intervention to advance democratic ideals, but they haven't considered the issues this method causes (Allison). They've also disregarded the values and interests of the people they're trying to convince. Vietnam in

1954 was a prime example of this; there was a push by communist leaders to unify Vietnam under one communist rule similar to that of the Soviet Union and China. The United States entered the Vietnam war, pushing for containment of communism and setting up South Vietnam modeled after American democracy, going against the self-determination of the Vietnamese people where Vietnam today still takes its roots back to North Vietnam as a one-party socialist republic (Rowe).

While there have been instances in which the United States has fallen short of the ideals of pure democracy, the idea that a government should be “elected by, and answerable to, the people” remains central to the country’s sense of self (Schildkraut). If a leader wants to keep a large number of people happy, he or she must act in a way that benefits the majority of people. If they don’t, they’ll be expelled or ousted. People in authoritarian regimes tend to assume leaders must keep just a tiny percentage of their constituents satisfied. As a result, they are less concerned about doing activities that are beneficial to the general population. Their actions benefit their friends at the expense of the wider public, which allows them to remain in power (*The rise of authoritarian capitalism in the twenty-first century*). Overall, *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, a peer-reviewed academic journal established in 1941, looked at the administrations of 133 nations from 1858 to 2010 and found that autocrats were either harmful or insignificant to their countries’ economies (Rowe).

Democracy and capitalism are often interwoven. While a democratic government assures responsible political institutions and an educated workforce with their fundamental rights, capitalism is seen as a method of providing the riches necessary to preserve political freedom (Norman). Both systems put the power in the hands of the individuals. It cannot be denied that a major driver of modern-day prosperity, innovation, and wealth creation is capitalism (Norman).

Competition and the accumulation of capital motivate companies to improve their efficiency, enabling investors to profit and consumers to benefit from lower prices on a wider range of goods and services (Norman).

On the contrary, socialists claim that concentrated wealth in the hands of rich capitalists results in a society with a few wealthy persons and a significant number of impoverished people, with the wealthy taking advantage of the less fortunate (Goldsmith). Greed is what socialists believe will lead to the destruction of the capitalist system. The capitalist believes that placing money in the hands of intelligent, successful, and hardworking people would push them to produce newer and better products and services because they will be financially rewarded (Goldsmith). They adhere to the "trickle-down" idea of wealth rather than the "trickle-up" theory of poverty that they assert socialists believe in (Norman). Capitalism, despite its flaws, is the most effective economic system for decreasing the wealth gap and converting the impoverished into productive citizens in our country and across the world (Goldsmith). Excellence is rewarded under capitalism, but mediocrity is rewarded in socialism.

However, there are good reasons to be skeptical of democracy's long-term economic success. The Western democracies' share in the global economy has dwindled to less than a third in 2019 (Goldsmith). No longer is it evident that American-style liberal democracy has prevailed almost three decades after the conclusion of the Cold War. On an unprecedented scale, Xi Jinping has cemented China's political dominance. Vladimir Putin has become president of Russia for the longest period of time since Joseph Stalin. Populism is undermining even many democracies. As a whole, countries like Russia and China may be flourishing, but the people do not prosper or feel that same empowerment. According to the 2022 United Nations happiness metric, Russia, China, and Vietnam rank between 74 and 85 on the metric, whereas the United States ranks in the top 20

with 19 other democratic nations (*The World Happiness Report*). Furthermore, The Annual Review of Political Science, which is a peer-reviewed academic journal dating back to 1998, found that 95% of the Vietnamese population favors a free market economy, making Vietnam the most pro-capitalist nation in the world even though the current system is based on socialism (Norman). Individualism, which leads to individual prosperity, is far greater in democratic nations than in non-democratic nations leading countries like Vietnam to want an American-style system to increase individual prosperity.

Economic independence is a basic tenet of individualism in the free market (Goldsmith). Capitalist or classical liberal civilizations are characterized by economic freedom, enabling individuals to make their own economic decisions. democracy and individualism are inseparable, and any other political philosophy or civilization will never be able to include them (Potter). The individualist must think and act on his or her ideas and to pursue his or her happiness (Potter). Individuals are born with the right to freedom. Democracy is still the best way to ensure long-term stability and prosperity (Potter).

For people in many other countries facing autocratic rule, the question is, how can we achieve what America has? People in countries and territories like Venezuela, Algeria and Hong Kong hope to make strides to achieve an American esque democracy. Right now, they try their hardest to achieve freedom and look at people like the Estonians as inspirations. Estonia is a small country near Russia that has worked to maintain independence against Russian influence for centuries. Against all odds, the Estonian people have come together time after time to defeat Russian and Soviet rule and influence their government and lives. To this day, they fight Russian influence but stay strong, happy, independent, and resilient with a strong democracy. Through this, they have come to an Estonian identity similar to American identity. Part of the Estonian

identity is based on the Estonian song and dance festival, where tens of thousands of Estonians come together to celebrate their freedom. They see it as when so many people come to celebrate their freedom; nothing is impossible. “We cherish our freedom and our culture with the song and dance festival we’re singing ourselves free showing what we are” (*The Song of Freedom at the Estonian Song & Dance Festival*). They have created a unique identity that can be replicated.

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